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DE RUEHCHI #0069/01 1221219
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FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0750
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0806

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000069

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, IO, DRL AND CA
NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/1/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: MILITARY DETENTION OF AMCIT UNDERSCORES SHIFT IN THAI POLICY
TOWARD BURMA

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 68
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 63
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 46
[1](#)D. CHIANG MAI 29
[1](#)E. CHIANG MAI 27
[1](#)F. 07 CHIANG MAI 188

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Acting CG, DOS, CG Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Amciti and Free Burma Rangers (FBR) head David Eubank, together with his wife and children, was detained by the military under martial law provisions April 29-May 1. This detention, like the tactics used in last month's raids by Thai security organs against Burmese exile groups, are a departure from previous Thai practice, which gave the exiles and activists significant leeway. This arrest appears linked to the visit to Thailand of the Burmese PM, and many contacts allege that the Thai are responding to specific requests by the Burmese to limit exile activities that the Thai would previously have tolerated. (Refs C, D, and E) End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On April 29, American Citizen and head of the Free Burma Rangers David Eubank (see Ref F for more detail on FBR and Eubank's activities) was detained by the Thai Third Army in Tak Province, along with his wife and three minor children. (See Ref A for details of the detention and subsequent release.) While Eubank has been questioned before by the Third Army about FBR's activities, this marked the first time he was required to stay in detention overnight. On April 30, the Eubanks were escorted to Chiang Mai, where, after a brief stop at their residence, they were taken to Kawila Army Barracks for further questioning. While Eubank's wife Karen and their three minor children were told on April 29 in Tak that they could return to Chiang Mai while Eubank remained in detention, they were not given the same option on April 30.

[1](#)3. (C) On May 1, Eubank told us he was questioned until midnight on April 29, and from the afternoon of April 30 until 2:00 am on the morning of May 1. During this latter session, Eubank signed a lengthy statement disclosing all of FBR's activities at the request of the Third Army. He asserted they told him he did not have to sign it, but that if he did not, he could be held for up to seven days under martial law, and that legal charges could also be filed. (Note: the government announced that martial law would be lifted, but there will be a significant time lag between this announcement and the signing of the royal decree

making it official. End note.) Wife Karen was also questioned on April 30, though this interrogation was carried out separately. The entire family was released on May 1 at approximately noon, after David and Karen signed a statement acknowledging their release, the fact that they entered a refugee camp without official permission, and that they were not in possession of their passports when military authorities asked for them on April 29.

14. (C) Eubank told us the soldiers who detained him in Tak said they had been ordered to do so by the highest political levels of the Thai Government, and were generally very apologetic. This message was reiterated to him by his captors in Chiang Mai, who told him his detention was linked to the on-going visit of Burmese Prime Minister General Thein Sein to Thailand. Eubank also informed us the Army Commander in Tak told him he [the commander] was going to clean up the entire Thai-Burma border area under his jurisdiction. While on route from Tak to Chiang Mai, Eubank said he also contacted "friends" in Thai Supreme Military command, who told him they were unaware of the order to detain him, and confirmed to him that it must have been issued at political levels of the Royal Thai Government. They advised him to keep a low profile for the time-being, he added. On May 1, he told us he was carefully reconsidering a slew of relief activities FBR had planned for the remainder of this year.

Comment

15. (C) The fact that the Eubanks were detained the same day Burmese PM Thein Sein began his official visit to Thailand is no coincidence. Their detention is just the latest in a chain of events that is qualitatively different from the way the RTG used to crack down against Burmese exiles/activists under Thaksin. Generally, raids against exile groups were not extensive or coordinated, nor did we have evidence that they may have been carried out at the request of the Burmese Government, unlike the April raids against the Karen National Union (Ref C). And to our knowledge, the RTG has never detained a foreign (non-Burmese) Burma activist. The fact that senior KNU leader

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Mahn Sha's killers were able to carry out an assassination in broad daylight (Refs D and E) with minimal Thai response may be another worrying sign. We will continue to track the RTG attitude toward these activists, but are concerned that the long-standing, laissez-faire Thai attitude toward the Burmese exiles and those who assist them may be changing.

16. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.
BARRASSO